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ABSTRACT

Data is brought to bear on the social influence hypothesis, according to which the behavior of one bystander influences other bystanders by providing information leading to a definition of the situation. The study placed a subject in an emergency situation in which one of 3 confederates served as a model: (1) male peer; (2) female peer; or (3) high status male. In the control condition there was no model. When a male model failed to offer assistance there was a significant decrease in helping on the part of the subjects. In all other cases the rate of helping was high. The results indicate that the greater influence of the male model, as compared with the female model, was due to his greater ability to provide information which could be accepted as a valid definition of the emergency situation. The authors interpret the results as supporting the social influence hypothesis of Latane and Darley (1968). (Author/TL)

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL INFLUENCE HYPOTHESIS OF BYSTANDER INTERVENTION IN EMERGENCIES[1]

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A number of recent studies have examined the responses of bystanders to an emergency in an attempt to account for the frequent failure of bystanders to offer aid or assistance to a victim. One hypothesis attempts to account for this failure by postulating a diffusion of responsibility (Darley and Latané, 1968). According to this hypothesis each bystander assumes that someone else will intervene and thus relieves himself of the responsibility to offer aid himself. Darley and Latané demonstrated that when the crowd of bystanders becomes larger, the chance that the victim will receive assistance becomes smaller. The larger the crowd, presumably, the easier each bystander will find it to diffuse responsibility to others rather than to act himself.

This hypothesis has been questioned recently by Piliavin, Rodin, and Piliavin (1969). When an emergency was staged on a subway the number of bystanders had no effect on the probability that a victim would receive assistance. It might be argued that people are always psychologically "alone" in a subway, and thus the number of people present is irrelevant. Nevertheless, the

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Piliavin study was conducted in a real life setting, rather than in the laboratory as was the Darley and Latané study, and thus a failure to find a diffusion of responsibility there is rather damaging to that hypothesis.

Whether or not the diffusion of responsibility hypothesis explains the failure to respond to all (or any) emergencies, an alternate interpretation has been advanced to handle situations in which the diffusion of responsibility hypothesis does not apply. Latané and Darley (1968) placed their subjects in a room which then began to fill with smoke. In this situation there was no single victim for all of the bystanders were potential victims. Once again, however, the more individuals present the less likely was anyone to report the emergency or attempt to cope with the situation. The authors note that the diffusion of responsibility hypothesis could not account for these results--for it is unlikely that the bystanders would diffuse responsibility for their own safety. These results were explained by means of a "social influence" hypothesis--namely, that the response to an emergency is contingent upon one's interpretation of the situation as a true emergency. One source of information for this interpretation is the responses of other people. As each bystander looks at the other, and finds that they have not responded, he interprets their inaction as an indication that they do not

believe the situation to be an emergency. Thus a state of pluralistic ignorance develops--with each bystander looking to the others for a definition of the situation, and each interpreting the inaction of the others as a definition of the situation as a non-emergency. Although this interpretation appears plausible, they present no direct evidence to support it.

Is there any evidence that a bystander will use the behavior of other bystanders to help him define the situation? Latané and Rodin (1969) reported that their subjects claimed not to have been at all influenced by the presence or action of the other bystanders during the emergency. Nevertheless, the victim was found to have a greater probability of receiving aid if the two bystanders were friends with each other than if they were strangers. The authors concluded that each bystander looked to the other for information--and friends were less likely to misinterpret each other's actions than were strangers. (They were, therefore, less likely to misinterpret their friend's inaction to mean that he had defined the situation as a non-emergency.)

The greater probability of intervention by friends might, however, be interpreted in terms of diffusion of responsibility. The authors cite a personal communication by Darley and Darley regarding a study in which friends intervened more than strangers even when they were not in contact with each other. They cite those results as evidence that friends are less likely to diffuse

responsibility than are strangers. If that is true, then the differences between friends and strangers in the Latané and Rodin study may have been produced by greater diffusion of responsibility among strangers rather than by increased clarity of social influence among friends. Increased helping behavior by friends would also be congruent with the view that an individual would be more motivated to appear socially responsible in the eyes of a friend than in the eyes of a stranger.

Latané and Rodin also note that friends discussed the situation more often than did strangers. Such discussion, however, does not necessarily indicate an attempt to seek a definition of the situation, for friends will speak to each other more often than strangers in any situation. Therefore, although these data are consistent with a social influence interpretation, they do not constitute a test of that hypothesis.

The present study was an attempt to bring data to bear on the social influence hypothesis. According to this hypothesis the behavior of one bystander influences other bystanders by providing information leading to a definition of the situation. If that is true, the action of a model should be more influential if he is perceived as a source of valid information--someone who can be expected to perceive the situation accurately and respond appropriately. If the behavior of the model can not be depended

upon to reflect an accurate definition of the situation, then whatever information is conveyed by his behavior should have little impact on other bystanders.

The present study placed a subject in an emergency situation in which one of three confederates served as a model. The model was either a male peer, a female peer, or a high status male. It was hypothesized that the behavior of a high status male model would be perceived as providing the most valid information regarding a definition of the situation, with the male peer providing less valid information and the female providing the least valid information. The more the model's behavior is accepted as valid information on which a definition of the situation could be based, the more his behavior should influence the subject.

Method

Subjects

Seventy male undergraduate students at Princeton University were subjects in this study. They were not recruited for the experiment but were merely observed as they responded to a staged emergency. They were randomly assigned to the seven conditions.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted in a social-dining hall at Princeton University. A tape-recorder was placed behind the locked door of a janitor's room. On a half-hour tape which played continuously were the sounds of someone apparently in distress. A portion of the script included: "Oh, help me, please somebody help me--------ooh, oooh, oooh----is somebody there, aah--------oooh, God, oooh God----please get me out of here--------oooh, oooh, ooh-----help me, my leg, my leg....." The tape was played at a moderate level so that it was easily audible in the hallway in the vicinity of the door, yet could not be heard further down the hall. The experiment was conducted during the afternoon when most individuals walking down the hall were walking alone on their way to study rooms or television rooms. Subjects approached the area of the emergency from a stairway from the floor below. At the sound of footsteps on the

stairs a confederate came around a corner from the opposite end of the hall. He timed his approach so that he would reach the door from which the sounds were emanating before the subject had reached that point. The subject, by that time, had reached a point from which he could hear the sounds. The confederate followed one of the following procedures.

Intervention. The confederate looked at the door, stopped in front of the door and tried the doorknob. He found the door locked. He remained in front of the door, trying the knob and apparently thinking about the situation.

Non-intervention. The confederate slowed as he passed the door, looking at the door for several seconds. He did not stop or attempt to open the door, but instead continued past the door, past the subject, and down the stairs.

Control. In the control condition there was no confederate present.

Confederate

The confederate was one of the following three individuals.

Female peer. An attractive, petite 19 year old (presumably from another college, as Princeton had no female undergraduates at the time of this study).

Male peer. An undergraduate of moderate build, wearing an old sweater, dungarees, loafers, and no socks. His hair was dishevelled.

Male high status. An undergraduate of somewhat larger build, who appeared rather older than the confederate in the peer condition. He was dressed in a coat and tie, carried a newspaper, raincoat, and an attache. He appeared to be a young professor.

Each confederate appeared in both the intervention and the non-intervention condition. There were ten subjects in each of the seven conditions.

Measures of the Subjects' Behavior

The subject was observed by the confederate and also by the experimenter who waited in a hidden position further down the hallway. They noted whether the subject attemped to be of assistance (stopping, trying the door, etc.). In the intervention condition it was noted whether or not the subject asked the confederate for information or offered assistance to the confederate.

After time for the subject's response had elapsed, the experimenter appeared and revealed that an experiment was being conducted but did not reveal the fact that the first bystander had been a confederate. He then asked the subject what had attracted his attention to the situation. The nature of the experiment was then explained to the subject and he was requested not to discuss it with anyone for two days.

If more than one subject approached the scene at the same time, the data was not recorded. The entire experiment was completed in the course of two afternoons.

Results

Although a subject's helping response might appear to be a similar response in all conditions, helping in the intervention condition is really quite different from helping in the non-intervention condition. In the intervention condition conformity or reduced inhibition might cause the subject to follow the confederate's lead and offer help. In the non-intervention condition, on the other hand, it is more likely that helping expresses a pure feeling of concern--strong enough to overcome the pressure to conform to the non-intervening confederate. Therefore, although the design might be conceptualized in terms of a 2 by 3 factorial, the meaning of the independent variable would be quite different in the different cells. The results are, therefore, analyzed separately for the intervention and the non-intervention conditions.

All subjects indicated that they had noticed the sounds coming from behind the door. No subject indicated any suspicion that an experiment was being conducted. Even after being debriefed there was no mention of suspicion.

Subjects' Helping Behavior

As may be seen in Table 1, the subjects in this study were generally quite willing to help. Even in the control condition,

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where no confederate was present, the level of helping behavior was quite high (90%). The only conditions in which the rate of helping was significantly affected by the actions of the confederate were the two male non-intervention conditions. In those conditions the actions of the confederate reduced the rate of helping significantly from that in the control condition ($p = .005$, Fisher's exact test).

Effect of status. In neither of the intervention nor the non-intervention conditions did the status of the male confederate have any effect on the extent of the subject's helping behavior (n.s. for both conditions, Fisher's exact test).

Effect of sex. The sex of the confederate had no effect on the rate of helping in the intervention condition (n.s. Fisher's exact test). This is not surprising when one considers the initially high rate of helping in the control condition. The addition of a helping confederate could not increase behavior which was already at the ceiling. In the non-intervention condition, however, the sex of the confederate emerged as an important factor. When the non-intervening confederate was male

the subjects were much less likely to help than if the confederate was female ($p = .005$, Fisher's exact test).

Confederate as a Source of Social Influence

At the end of the experiment the subject was asked to explain what had drawn his attention to the situation. His answers to this question indicated whether or not he had used the actions of the confederate to guide him in his decision. Any mention of the confederate's behavior was scored as an indication that the confederate was a factor in the decision.

Although the status level of the male confederate had virtually no effect, the sex variable had considerable effect. As may be seen in Table 1, the male confederate was generally mentioned as a factor in the subject's decision while the female confederate was not. This difference is highly significant ($p = .0001$ in the intervention condition; $p = .001$ in the non-intervention condition, Fisher's exact test).

Such overall results are not very meaningful for they include both subjects who copied the behavior of the confederate as well as those who did not. One would not expect a subject whose behavior had been different from the confederate to cite the confederate's actions as a factor in his own decision. It is, therefore, more meaningful to examine the data from only those

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subjects whose behavior paralleled that of the confederate. Table 2 contains the results of those subjects who followed the confederate's lead and offered help in the intervention condition. In the intervention condition all sixteen of the subjects who offered help after seeing the male confederate intervene indicated that the confederate's behavior had been a factor in their own decision. Only three of the ten subjects who intervened after observing the female confederate intervene made similar statements ($p = .0001$, Fisher's exact test).

After the subject had stopped by the door alongside the intervening confederate, the sex of the confederate continued to effect the subject's behavior. If the confederate was male, the subjects made verbal offers of help to the <u>confederate</u> (offered to help him open the door, etc.). Such offers were not usually made to the female confederate ($p = .005$, Fisher's exact test) even though it would have been more appropriate to offer assistance to a woman.

The extent to which the subject asked the confederate for information was influenced by both sex and status. More questions

were directed at the male peer than the male status confederate ($p = .01$, Fisher's exact test). When the male peer was compared with the female peer (status is thus held constant) more questions were directed at the male than the female ($p = .05$, Fisher's exact test). When both male conditions were collapsed and compared with the female condition there were no significant sex differences.

In the non-intervention condition 13 subjects failed to offer help after seeing the male confederate do likewise. Out of this number all but one cited the actions of the confederate as a factor in his decision. Only one subject failed to offer help after seeing the female confederate do likewise and he did not cite her actions as a factor in his decision. Although the small number of subjects who followed the lead of the female confederate in this condition did not permit a statistical analysis, the results are at least consistent with those in the intervention condition.

Discussion

According to the social influence hypothesis, the model will be most influential when his actions are accepted by other bystanders as valid information which can help define the situation. If this hypothesis is correct, the greater influence of the male model as compared to the female model in the non-intervention condition should be traceable to a greater ability on the part of the male model to define the situation by his actions.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which the model was perceived as a source of information by asking the subjects in the non-intervention condition to indicate their reactions to the model. In order to appear consistant subjects might have attributed influence to the model when their own behavior copied the model's behavior, and attributed no influence when it did not.

It is possible to obtain a clearer picture of the way in which the model was perceived by examining the results of the intervention condition. In this condition the model stopped to offer help and almost all of the subjects did likewise, regardless of the sex of the model. Although the sex of the model did not affect the subject's helping behavior (presumably due to the ceiling effect mentioned earlier), the attribution of influence was affected by the sex of the model. When the model was male

he was more likely to be cited as a factor in the subject's decision to offer help, more likely to be treated as a partner in coping with the emergency, and when status was held constant he was more likley to be asked for information than was a female. All evidence, therefore, leads to the conclusion that a male bystander in an emergency is an important source of information regarding the situation, while a female bystander is not. It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the effect of the sex of the model on the rate of helping in the non-intervention condition may be attributed to the greater social influence on the part of the male. When the non-intervening model was a man, his implicit definition of the situation as a non-emergency was accepted by the subject--who then failed to offer help also. When the non-intervening model was a woman her behavior did not serve as a valid definition of the situation--and thus the subjects choose to offer help anyway. Although the sex of the model did not affect the rate of helping in the intervention condition, this may easily be explained by the high rate of helping in the control condition. The addition of a helping model (of either sex) simply had no effect at all on an already high rate of helping.

We should be very careful, however, before we interpret these results to mean that the ability to dispense valid

information is mediated solely by sex. This study was conducted at Princeton University in the spring of 1969, at which time the undergraduate college was all male. A young woman might, therefore, have been perceived as a stranger to the campus. It is quite possible that her role as stranger had equal if not greater effect than her role as a female on her ability to serve as a source of valid information.

The failure of the status manipulation to show any effect on the subjects' behavior might have been due to a failure of the manipulation to produce a real difference in perceived status. However, there were fewer questions addressed to the high status than to the low status male. This is compatible with our knowledge of status differences. Secord and Backman (1964) note that "Communication upward is hazardous; persons are never sure that the high-status person will behave in a rewarding fashion" (p. 320). However, even if the status manipulation had been successful, the high status model would have appeared to be a young professor--and that might have been irrelevant to the situation. In all probability the behavior of a high status figure will only be accepted as a source of more valid information if his higher status is somehow related to an increased ability to define or cope with the emergency.

It should be noted that the results of the non-intervention condition are not subject to an explanation based on the

diffusion of responsibility. Although a subject might be more willing to diffuse responsibility onto a male than a female, neither confederate was available to accept a portion of the responsibility. Unlike previous research in which the non-intervening confederates (or other subjects) have not responded, the non-intervening confederate in the present study indicated that he would <u>never</u> respond--for he had left the scene. Thus the subject cannot diffuse responsibility for he is the only remaining bystander and the responsibility is once again his alone. The fact that the confederate had left the scene also eliminates the possibility that the sex of the confederate had differentially inhibited the subject's response. Once the confederate had gone there was no audience to witness the subject's behavior, and thus no inhibition due to the presence of others. Therefore, the most parsimonious explanation of the results would be in terms of the social influence hypothesis. The male bystander had a greater influence on the subject's behavior than did the female because the behavior of the male was more readily accepted as a definition of the situation.

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Footnotes

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Table 1

Percentage of Subjects who Offered Help and Cited the Confederate as a Source of Information

Condition	Offering help	Citing the confederate as a source of information
Confederate intervenes		
Female confederate[a]	100%	30%
Male peer confederate	80	80
Male status confederate	80	80
Confederate does not intervene		
Female confederate	90%	0%
Male peer confederate	30	60
Male status confederate	40	60
Control	90%	-

[a]N = 10 in each condition

Table 2

Behavior of Subjects who Offered Help

in the Intervention Condition

Condition	Number of subjects offering help	Cited the confederate as a source of information	Offered help to the confederate	Asked the confederate for information
Female confederate	10	30%	0%	50%
Male peer confed.	8	100	87	100
Male status confed.	8	100	100	25